

Older Volunteers Leading the Way

Advancements in medicine, public health, and technology have made it more common for people to live much longer—even beyond 90. In 2000, 46 million Americans were age 60 or older. Older adults represent a tremendous growing resource.

Experience matters and older adults have a lifetime of knowledge and skills to share. Older Americans, especially retirees, are in an excellent position to volunteer. Volunteering provides an opportunity to contribute to society and to remain socially and intellectually stimulated. And older adults—with the wealth of life experiences they have attained—constitute some of America's most valued volunteers.

How Many Older American Volunteer?

Research reveals that older Americans are involved in their communities:

According to a survey sponsored by the Independent Sector, in 1998, a total of 26.4 million older volunteers (aged 55+) gave approximately 5.6 billion hours of their time at a value of \$77.2 billion.

A survey conducted in 2002 by Peter D. Hart Research Associates found that 56 percent of the respondents, who ranged in age from 50 to 75, said that community service was or would be an important part of their retirement. The survey also found that more than half (57 percent) of respondents had volunteered in the past three years, and that 25 percent were devoting at least five hours a week to community work.

What Are the Health Benefits of Volunteering?

Increasingly, however, studies indicate that there are real health reasons for older persons to volunteer. Research evidence proves that for older adults in particular, volunteering offers very real personal, physical, and emotional benefits.

While researchers agree that additional research is needed, all also agree that volunteering improves the overall quality of life for older persons because it gives meaning and purpose to their lives. It also offers the following specific benefits:

Volunteers are healthier—studies show that older persons who volunteer have fewer medical problems than the senior population in general.

Volunteering increases one's physical health and agility—volunteer activities help older persons stay physically active. Older adults who engage in regular physical activity, whether moderate or intense, have lower incidences of heart disease and diabetes and are at lower risk for other cardiovascular diseases.

Volunteering increases one's cognitive and mental well-being—this points to the “use it or lose it” theory for cognitive ability. Volunteering helps keep the brain engaged, which helps protect the memory as people age.

WHAT WE DO *makes a difference*

FACT SHEET

Older Volunteers...cont'd.

Volunteer Opportunities

Older volunteers are impacting virtually every aspect of American society including health, education, social services, youth, culture, the arts, and the environment. The following represents some of the ways older American can get involved:

USA Freedom Corps

President George W. Bush has called upon every American to get involved in strengthening America's communities and sharing America's compassion around the world. He created the USA Freedom Corps to help all Americans to answer his call. The USA Freedom Corps Network has been built where individuals can find service opportunities that match their interests and talents in their hometowns, across the country, or around the world. To learn more, go to USA Freedom Corps Web site at www.freedomcorps.gov.

Older Americans Act Programs

Each year about seven to nine million older people use Older Americans Act (OAA) services, whose delivery largely depends upon the efforts of half a million volunteers. These volunteers work through a nationwide network of federal, state, and local organizations that offer opportunities and services to active older persons as well as those elderly who need help.

Examples of volunteer activities include assisting at group meals sites and delivering meals to the home-bound elderly; escorting frail older persons to health care services, on shopping errands, and to other needed services; counseling older persons in a variety of areas including health promotion, nutrition, legal and financial concerns;

assisting in senior center, day care, and other group programs for seniors.

Anyone interested in volunteering in Older Americans Act programs should contact their Area Agency on Aging. To locate an Area Agency on Aging near you, contact the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or visit www.eldercare.gov.

U.S. Administration on Aging Supported Programs

Senior Medicare Patrol

The Senior Medicare Patrol projects teach volunteer retired professionals, such as doctors, nurses, accountants, investigators, law enforcement personnel, attorneys, and teachers, to help Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries to be better health care consumers, by identifying and by preventing billing errors and potential fraud. To learn more about Senior Medicare Patrol volunteers, go to www.aoa.gov/smp.

Family Friends

Family Friends volunteers are men and women over 55 years of age who are interested in working with children who have special needs. They are advocates for children who need a helping and loving hand. Family Friends volunteers are recruited from the community at large. Volunteers receive extensive training. For more information, visit www.family-friends.org.

Experience Corps

Experience Corps places a critical mass of older adult volunteers in schools and youth-focused organizations in their communities. Started in 1995 as a pilot project in five

cities, Experience Corps currently operates in 14 cities across the country. Among their many roles, the older adults work one-on-one with young children, create before- and after-school programs, and serve as advocates for children and their needs in the larger community. For more information, visit www.experiencecorps.org.

Senior Corps

Senior Corps is a network of programs that tap the experience, skills, and talents of older citizens to meet community challenges. Through its three programs—Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and RSVP (formerly Retired and Senior Volunteer Program)—more than half a million Americans age 55 and over assist local nonprofits, public agencies, and faith-based organizations in carrying out their missions. Senior Corps is administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Foster Grandparents offer support to children with special needs. Senior Companions provide assistance to help other older individuals live independently, and RSVP volunteers provide a variety of services, from teaching adult education computer classes to assisting local law enforcement agencies.

The Senior Corps is also part of a national effort to promote seniors as a resource to all nonprofit, faith-based, and

public agencies and has developed an online recruitment system to help these agencies recruit older volunteers.

For more information about Senior Corps programs, call 1-800-424-8867 or visit www.seniorcorps.org to find local volunteer opportunities in your community.

Volunteering in Your Community

Not only are there many volunteer opportunities open to older persons through federal programs, community level agencies and organizations; they also welcome the talents of the elderly. Many communities have volunteer centers that offer information about the types of volunteer opportunities available and the agencies and organizations that are seeking volunteer assistance. To locate the Volunteer Center in your community, call 1-800-VOLUNTEER or visit www.pointsoflight.org.

This fact sheet was prepared in collaboration with the Corporation for National and Community Service.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging (AoA), works with a nationwide network of organizations and service providers to make support services and resources available to older persons and their caregivers. For more information about the AoA, please contact: **the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging**, Washington, DC 20201, Phone 202-619-0724, e-mail aoainfo@aoa.gov, Web site: www.aoa.gov

